

Salt River Fire Department Operating Guidelines

Lost/Trapped Firefighter Basic Self Survival

April 2000

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PURPOSE

The following are basic guidelines for firefighters to follow if they become lost or trapped in a building:

The nature of firefighting places the firefighter at risk of becoming lost or trapped. The toxic environment provides only a narrow window of survivability. Survival depends on a mix of predictable self-survival actions by the lost firefighter and the incident commander.

BASIC SELF-SURVIVAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The rescue of trapped or lost firefighters in a burning building is especially time sensitive. There is a very narrow "window of survivability" for a firefighter(s) who is out of SCBA air supply or trapped by approaching fire. Individual firefighters must not delay reporting to Command if they become lost, trapped or in need of assistance. Company officers must not delay the reporting of lost firefighters or inability, to complete accountability reports. Command and sector officers must always assume that the missing firefighter(s) is lost in the building until he or she can be accounted for. Command must restructure the strategy and action plans to include a priority rescue effort, if a firefighter is reported missing.

All crews entering the Hazard Zone must have a portable radio. Minimum crew size is two and crewmembers must remain intact. Crews must have an assignment and must be working under the direct supervision of a Sector Officer or Command.

CALL FOR HELP IMMEDIATELY

Firefighters who find themselves lost or trapped must immediately use "May Day" to announce their situation while they continue to attempt to find their way out. Firefighters should not delay notification of distress. Notifications should occur as soon as the firefighter THINKS he or she is in trouble.

Delay compromises the window of survivability. Lost firefighters should give Command information as to who they are, how many firefighters, what sector they were operating in, where they THINK they are (as accurately as possible), description of building structures surrounding them, sounds of nearby activities, (i.e., ventilation saw noise), or any other information that might direct rescue crews (RIC) to their location.

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"MAY-DAY" RADIO MESSAGE

The radio message "May-Day" will be used by a lost or trapped firefighter to report their status as being in trouble and needing rescue. Any member may use "May-Day" to report a lost firefighter. Any report of "May-Day" will receive priority radio traffic, followed by the emergency traffic tone. The term "May-Day" will be reserved ONLY to report lost or trapped firefighters. The term "emergency traffic" will be used to report other emergencies.

OTHER RADIO CHANNEL

If a lost firefighter can not contact Command, dispatch/alarm, or any other units on the assigned radio channel, the firefighter should go to another channel to attempt contact and declare an emergency. Channel 1 (dispatch) is preferred. It's important to find any channel that works. Once communication is established remain on that channel and messages will be relayed to Command.

ACTIVATE PASS DEVICE

As soon as a firefighter recognizes he/she is lost or trapped, the PASS device must be manually activated to sound the audible tone. The device must remain on until rescued. If the device interferes with the lost firefighters communicating critical radio messages to incident commander or rescuers, the device may be turned off temporarily. Once messages are completed, the device must again be manually activated. Members who hear an active PASS device must respond to it as a call for help and report information to Command as appropriate.

CREWS STAY TOGETHER

Members that separate from each other make it difficult for rescuers to find all firefighters. Crewmembers that stay intact as a crew enhance their chances for ALL being rescued and allow easier, more efficient extrication.

FOLLOW THE HOSE OR LIFELINE OUT

Crewmembers should stay with the hoseline (or lifeline) and follow it out whenever possible. All firefighters must remember that the female side of the couplings leads toward the nozzle (the fire), male side of the couplings toward the pump (outside). The hoseline should always be treated as a safety line to the outside. Where lifeline ropes are in use, follow the lifeline to the exterior.

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SEARCHING FOR AN EXIT

A lost firefighter should always attempt to get out of the building by whatever means possible. Where doors, windows, or other egress is not available, firefighters should next attempt to reach an exterior wall.

Once at the wall he/she will be able to search for doorways, windows, and hallways, which generally lead to the outside. Rescuers will first search hallways, around walls, and around windows and doors, before sweeping large interior areas. For this reason, firefighters must avoid collapsing in the middle of open spaces. Getting to hallways, doors, or windows will increase the chances of being rescued early. These actions also provide predictable activities that will aid rescuers.

RETREAT TO A SAFE REFUGE

When the firefighter cannot find a way out, but there is a safe refuge (protective room or floor) away from the fire that the firefighter can retreat to, he/she should take advantage of this location. Command and the rescuers should then be advised of the location, by whatever means possible.

STAY CALM AND CONSERVE AIR

A conscious effort must be made by the lost firefighter to control breathing. Unnecessary talking or physical activity must be ceased, unless absolutely needed. Firefighters must control and pace their physical exertion activities in order to extend their SCBA air supply.

SCBA FACE PIECE FILTER

If the SCBA air supply is depleted, the firefighter may use the protective hood as a filter. The hood may be placed in or over the face piece open inhalation valve attachment area.

HORIZONTAL POSITION

If a firefighter cannot get out, he/she should assume a horizontal position on the floor that maximizes the audible affects of the PASS device. The firefighter should attempt to take this position at an exterior wall, doorway or hallway that maximizes quick discovery by rescue crews.

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FLASHLIGHTS/TAPPING NOISE

If assuming a position to await rescuers, the firefighter should attempt to position his/her flashlight toward the ceiling. This will enhance the rescuer's ability to see the light and locate the downed firefighter. If able, the firefighter should attempt tapping noises to assist rescuers in locating him/her (i.e., hitting a tool against a metal roll-up door).

COMPANY OR SECTOR OFFICERS

Company officers or sector officers who are unable to locate a crew or firefighters assigned to them, must immediately notify Command and use "MAY-DAY" to notify all personnel operating on the fireground.

When possible the company or sector officer should include who's missing, last known location, and actions being taken. Firefighting positions must not be abandoned during the rescue effort and the Company and Sector officers must control free-lancing. Command will initiate a rescue effort.